

BEWARE OF “THE RAGAMUFFIN GOSPEL”

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A book called “The Ragamuffin Gospel,” first published in 1990, continues to have a polluting effect upon individuals and churches.

This book first came to my attention as I was researching contemporary Christian music in 1998 in preparation for the publication of *Contemporary Christian Music Under the Spotlight*. Some of the most influential CCM musicians are mightily impressed with *The Ragamuffin Gospel*. Notable among these are Michael W. Smith (who wrote the foreword to *The Ragamuffin Gospel*), Michael Card (who named his oldest son after the author of *The Ragamuffin Gospel*), and the late Rich Mullins (who formed the Ragamuffin Band).

The author of *The Ragamuffin Gospel* is Brennan Manning. Although he is a Roman Catholic, the book is published by Multnomah Press, the printing arm of Multnomah College of the Bible, an alleged evangelical institution.

In spite of his gross heresies, Manning has been well-received into evangelical circles.

His books have been recommended by Philip Yancey, Eugene Peterson, Larry Crabb, Michael Card, Michael W. Smith, the members of U2, and many others.

He is scheduled to speak at the Life Impact 2006 Christian & Missionary Alliance conference in July 2007. He spoke at the Northwest Regional Pastors Event at the Vineyard Church in Vancouver, B.C., in 2004.

Christianity Today has promoted Manning and in an October 6, 2005 interview called “The Ragamuffin Gospel” a “spiritual classic.” After they published the article “A Coward Who Stayed to Help,” which was Manning’s story of his alleged heroics helping victims during the Hurricane Katrina disaster, five days later they had to publish a correction stating that Manning had admitted that he had made up the story. In a voice message to *Christianity Today* he blithely said, “The essential truth: I lied” (“Brennan Manning, Featured Speaker” James Sundquist, June 24, 2007).

In the last two decades Manning has published a dozen or more popular books in addition to *The Ragamuffin Gospel*, including *Abba’s Child: The Cry of the Heart for Intimate Belonging* (Navpress, 1994), *The Signature of Jesus* (Multnomah, 1996), *The Boy Who Cried Abba: A Parable of Trust and Acceptance* (1998, 2001), *Reflections for Ragamuffins* (1998), *A Ruthless Trust: The Ragamuffin’s Path to God* (2000), *The*

Wisdom of Tenderness (2002), *The Journey of the Prodigal* (2002), *The Wisdom of Tenderness: What Happens When God's Fierce Mercy Transforms Our Lives* (2002), *The Rabbi's Heartbeat* (Navpress, 2003), *Posers, Fakers, and Wannabes: Unmasking the Real You* (Navpress, 2003), *A Glimpse of Jesus: The Stranger to Self-Hatred* (2003), *Above All: He Took the Fall and Thought of Me* (2003), *Lion and Lamb: The Relentless Tenderness of Jesus* (Revell, 2004).

MANNING'S FALSE GOSPEL

Manning's web site features his biography. What is glaringly absent is any scriptural testimony of salvation. Instead, we find the following statement:

"In February 1956, while Brennan was meditating on the Stations of the Cross, a powerful experience of the personal love of Jesus Christ sealed the call of God on his life."

There is no repentance, no rejection of false gospels, no Scriptural new birth, merely a "sealing" of that which began at his infant baptism. Manning went on to become a Franciscan priest and though he is no longer active he continues to attend and promote the blasphemous Catholic mass. When he is in his home in New Orleans he attends the morning daily mass at the Holy Spirit Catholic Church.

Manning preaches a false antinomian, psychology-influenced gospel, meaning he believes a person can be saved and continue to live in the grossest sin without repentance. Following Rome's pattern, Manning's gospel glosses over the basis for salvation, which is the blood and death of Jesus Christ (even while giving it lip service), and ignores the necessity of the new birth. Manning uses biblical terms but he redefines them, giving them unbiblical meanings. His writings are filled with half truths and statements of truth followed by contradictions to those statements.

Manning continually quotes from and unquestioningly affirms the writings of false teachers such as Paul Tillich (an adulterous neo-orthodox theologian), Carl Jung (who wrote under the guidance of a demon and who considered Christianity a myth), Beatrice Bruteau (a proponent of the new age "I am god" heresy), Henri Nouwen, Thomas Merton, Teresa of Avila, and Francis MacNutt (Roman Catholics), Pierre Teilhard de chardin (mystic), Morton Kelsey (a disciple of Agnes Sanford), Thomas Aquinas and "St." Augustine (fathers of the Catholic Church), Dietrich Bonhoeffer (a father of Neo Orthodoxy).

Manning says, "To evangelize a person is to say to him or her: you, too, are loved by God in the Lord Jesus" (*The Ragamuffin Gospel*, 2nd edition, 2000, p. 120). This is not the gospel and it is not scriptural evangelism. While it is certainly true that God loves sinners that is only a part of the matter; God is also holy and will judge every infraction of His

law. The biblical gospel begins with the bad news of man's fallen condition and his guilt and only when the sinner acknowledges this and repents and puts his trust exclusively in Jesus Christ can he experience God's love in a saving manner (Romans 3:21 - 4:25).

Manning says, "God is a kooky God who can scarcely bear to be without us" (*The Ragamuffin Gospel*, p. 165). It is blasphemous to describe God as "kooky." And if His love means He can "scarcely bear to be without us," what is eternal Hell all about? Jesus frequently warned about Hell, and warned, in fact, that most sinners will go there. "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matt. 7:13-14).

Writing about the woman in John 8 who was caught in adultery, Manning says that Jesus "didn't demand a firm purpose of amendment" and "didn't seem too concerned that she might dash back into the arms of her lover" (*The Ragamuffin Gospel*, 1990, p. 167). To the contrary, Jesus commanded her, "Go, and sin no more" (Jn. 8:11). Similarly, after Jesus healed the crippled man in John 5 He instructed him, "Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee" (Jn. 5:14).

Manning mentions in particular some people that he has met: a female prostitute, a woman who had an abortion, and a male homosexual (*Ragamuffin*, pp. 32-33). He claims that all of these are saved even though they justify their sin and have no intention of turning from it. The apostle Paul addressed Manning's error in 1 Corinthians 6:9-13:

9 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,

10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

11 And such WERE some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

12 All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.

13 Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body.

The church members at Corinth had lived in all sorts of wicked lives before they were saved, but after they believed on Christ they were changed, and Paul warned them about going back to the old life. He warned them, in particular, about fornication. The gospel of Christ teaches that sinners are saved by God's grace without works, but it also teaches that those who are saved are saved "unto good works" (Ephesians 2:8-10).

The apostle John taught: “And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. HE THAT SAITH, I KNOW HIM, AND KEEPETH NOT HIS COMMANDMENTS, IS A LIAR, AND THE TRUTH IS NOT IN HIM” (1 John 2:3-4).

Manning says: “Something is radically wrong when the local church rejects a person accepted by Jesus: when a harsh, judgmental and unforgiving sentence is passed on homosexuals; when a divorcee is denied communion; when the child of a prostitute is refused baptism; when an unlaicized priest is forbidden the sacraments” (*The Ragamuffin Gospel*, p. 30).

There is a world of confusion and doctrinal error in this one statement. First, the Scriptures instruct churches to reject those who claim to be saved but who live in gross sin (1 Corinthians 5). Second, Manning assumes that judging things by God’s Word is “harsh” and “unforgiving” but this certainly does not have to be the case. Believers are instructed by God to “prove all things” (1 Thess. 5:21). The Bible says, “... he that is spiritual judgeth all things” (1 Cor. 2:15). Third, Manning claims that forgiveness should be given whether or not there is repentance on the part of the sinner, but the Bible says there is no forgiveness without repentance (Lk. 13:3, 5; Acts 17:30; 20:21; 26:20; 2 Cor. 7:9-10; 2 Pet. 3:9). Jesus said, “If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and IF HE REPENT, forgive him” (Lk. 17:3). Fourth, Manning claims that God accepts the homosexual whether or not he repents and changes, but the Bible says the sinner must repent and those who are truly saved are changed. “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). Fifth, Manning teaches the heresy of infant baptism, whereas the Bible says baptism is for believers only (Mk. 16:15). Sixth, Manning defends the Catholic priesthood, whereas the New Testament says every believer is a priest in Christ (1 Peter 2:5, 9). Seventh, Manning defends the unscriptural Catholic sacraments even though they have no support in the Scripture.

Manning even claims that those who take the mark of the Beast will be saved. “And he [Christ] will say to us: ‘Vile beings, you who are in the image of the beast and bear his mark, but come all the same, you as well’” (*The Ragamuffin Gospel*, p. 21). To the contrary, the book of Revelation plainly states that all who take the mark of the Beast will suffer in Hell. “And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name” (Rev. 14:9-11).

PROMOTING EASTERN MEDITATION

Manning is one of the many writers today in “evangelical” circles promoting eastern-style meditation. In *The Ragamuffin Gospel* he encourages the use of mantras and emptying the mind. He instructs Christians to repeat an eight-word mantra (“The Lord is my Shepherd, I lack nothing”) for 10 minutes. He says:

“The first step toward rejuvenation begins with accepting where you are and exposing your poverty, frailty, and emptiness to the love that is everything. Don’t try to feel anything, think anything, or do anything ... Don’t force prayer. Simply relax in the presence of the God you half believe in and ask for a touch of folly” (*The Ragamuffin Gospel*, p. 196).

This is as close as Manning comes to describing how to receive the gospel, and it is unscriptural. The Bible does not invite the sinner to relax in the presence of God and half believe, but to repent and to believe fully from the heart. The model for our faith is Abraham, who was not weak in faith (Rom. 4:19) and who “staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief” (Rom. 4:20). Manning suggests that the sinner does not need to think anything. To the contrary, the Bible says he must believe the gospel, which is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ for our sins (1 Cor. 15:1-4). If one would be saved, there is a lot to think about!

Manning promotes visualization, instructing people to visualize what Jesus might have looked like (p. 197). This is vain idolatry. No man knows what Jesus looked like, and if I visualize what I THINK He looked like I am creating my own idol.

Manning promotes silent meditation. He once spent six months in isolation in a cave in Spain. He meditates in silence each day. He spends eight days a year at a Jesuit retreat center in Colorado during which he speaks only 45 minutes each day. His primary spiritual director is a Dominican nun.

In his book *Abba’s Child*, Manning recommends the writings of Beatrice Bruteau. She is the founder of The School for Contemplation and believes that God is within every human being. She says that each person can say, “I AM,” which is a name for Almighty God.

The meditation promoted by Manning is pure Hinduism. I practiced it as a member of the Self-Realization Fellowship Society prior to my salvation, and I know people who have become demon possessed by practicing it.

It is no surprise that Manning is popular in evangelical circles, in light of the popularity of Roman Catholic meditative prayer techniques.

On a research visit in February 2000 to the Golden Gate Theological Seminary in San Francisco, a Southern Baptist school, I found that most of the required reading materials

for the course on “Classics of Church Devotion” are books by Roman Catholic authors. These included *Spiritual Exercises* by Ignatius of Loyola (founder of the Jesuits), *The Cloud of Unknowing* (by an unknown 14th century Catholic monk), *New Seeds of Contemplation* by Thomas Merton (a Catholic convert from Anglicanism), *Confessions of Saint Augustine* (one of the fathers of the Roman Catholic Church), *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas Kempis, *Selected Works* of Bernard of Clairvaux, and *The Interior Castle* by Teresa of Avila (the latter two are Catholic “saints”).

On a research visit to the Vineyard Church in Anaheim, Calif., on August 31, 2003, the message was on contemplative prayer. The speaker described this as “gazing at length on something” and as “lying back and floating in the river of God’s peace.” He quoted St. John of the Cross, “It is in silence that we hear him.” The Vineyard speaker recommended the writings of the late Thomas Merton, a Catholic priest who converted from the Anglican Church and whose writings are influential in the “centering prayer” movement. Merton spent the last 27 years of his life in a Trappist monastery devoted to Mary (Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani in Kentucky) and promoted the integration of pagan practices such as Zen Buddhism and Christianity. The titles of some of his books were “Zen and the Birds of the Appetite,” “The Way of Chuang Tzu,” and “Mystics and the Zen Masters.” For three years, Merton lived as a complete hermit.

Brennan Manning also recommends Merton’s writings. In *Signature of Jesus*, Manning gives this quote from William Shannon: “During a conference on contemplative prayer, the question was put to Thomas Merton: ‘How can we best help people to attain union with God?’ His answer was very clear: ‘We must tell them that they are already united with God.’ Contemplative prayer is nothing other than coming into consciousness of what is already there.”

MANNING’S ANTI-FUNDAMENTALISM

In light of Manning’s attitude toward a strict fundamentalist approach to Scripture it is no wonder that the Contemporary Christian Music crowd and the New Evangelicals love him so. Surely they recognize the voice of one of their own in the following statements.

Manning warns about “academicians who would imprison Jesus in the ivory tower of exegesis” (*The Ragamuffin Gospel*, p. 14). Thus after the fashion of the theological modernist Manning puts Jesus over against the Bible, ignoring the fact that we know nothing about Jesus apart from the Bible. And Manning despises doctrinal dogmatism, ignoring the obvious fact that any definition of who Jesus is and what He did is based on biblical exegesis and is doctrinal.

Manning warns about “the Bible thumper” (*The Ragamuffin Gospel*, p. 36).

Manning says we should “listen to people in other denominations and religions” and we shouldn’t “find demons in those with whom we disagree” (*The Ragamuffin Gospel*, p. 65).

In typical ecumenical, New Evangelical fashion, Manning warns against being “either-or” and opts rather for the mythical “both-and.” He says: “If we are open, we rarely resort to either-or, either creation or evolution, liberty or law, sacred or secular, Beethoven or Madonna. We focus on both-and, fully aware that God’s truth cannot be imprisoned in a small definition.... But the open mind realizes that reality, truth, and Jesus Christ are incredibly open-ended” (p. 65).

It is obvious that Manning has a different religion from that of the Lord’s apostles, who were incredibly dogmatic. The apostle John, for example, said: “And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness” (1 John 5:19). From the perspective of the mushy, can’t-be-pinned-down-on-anything Christianity of Brennan Manning, 1 John 5:19 is incredibly narrow-minded and wrong headed, but I will gladly take my stand with the Lord’s apostles.

Note, too, Mannings’ openness to the most extreme forms of worldliness, as exemplified by Madonna, “The Material Girl.”

MANNING AND HOMOSEXUALITY

Manning identifies “homophobia” as “among the most serious and vexing moral issues of this generation” (*Abba’s Child*).

A phobia is an unreasonable fear of something, in this case, homosexuality. Thus, Manning would have us believe that those who reject homosexuals and who do not want them to influence society, who oppose their parades and “marriages,” have some sort of psychological illness. In fact, according to Manning, one of the most serious moral issues of our day is the rejection of homosexuality in the part of Bible believers.

To be consistent, Manning must lump Paul into the “homophobic” camp, because he strongly condemned homosexuality.

Paul on homosexuality: “For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet” (Rom. 1:26-27).

Multnomah Press has been confronted by Bible believers in regard to the doctrinal errors of Brennan Manning and his book, but they continue to publish it to this day. (On the

other hand, Multnomah has dropped Dave Hunt's masterly book "What Love Is This" bowing under the vicious onslaught by Calvinists who have pretended that Hunt is unqualified to write on the subject and that he did not get his facts right. In the third edition of "What Love Is This" Hunt has proven conclusively that he has not taken quotes out of context and has indeed gotten his facts right.)

Beware of *The Ragamuffin Gospel*. It is "another gospel" (Gal. 1:6). The true gospel is a "glorious gospel" (1 Tim. 1:11); and though it is a gospel of grace for sinners, there is nothing ragamuffin about it.

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